

New Cost-Sharing Framework to Start Oct. 1

Under 2008 law's mandate, many states will have to pay more to keep trains

A major concern for train advocates is how various short-distance trains will fare come Oct. 1 in light of Section 209 of the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act (PRIIA, see Aug. 2010 *News*).

The law, aimed at creating a "level playing field" for state support of routes shorter than 750 miles, would force most affected states to pay more to Amtrak. There are big impacts for California, Michigan, New York and Virginia.

Under the law, Amtrak and the states developed and agreed a uniform methodology for sharing the costs of less-than-750-mile trains outside the Boston-Washington line.

By November 2011, each affected state except Indiana had agreed the new framework. Since Indiana was a hold-out, the Surface Transportation Board on Mar. 15, 2012 issued an order affirming the policy (ww.bit.ly/stb209).

States will pay:

- all "Third Party" costs (defined as host railroad charges & fuel),
- all "Route Costs" (direct & shared costs that are clearly route related), and "Additives" (costs shared between routes, expressed as percentages of selected Route Cost categories); and
- a pro-rata share of equipment overhauls based on the percentage of Amtrak-owned equipment used (first time states are paying for this).

The first two bullets comprise about 88% of a route's operating costs. States partly offset the costs by pocketing their trains' passenger revenues.

The New York and Michigan governors have included adequate funds in their budgets for the coming fiscal year to keep their trains running. New York-Niagara Falls and Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac operations have been 100% Amtrak funded, so have a big transition.

Pennsylvania DOT, through state-

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Come to Washington April 22-24

Take part in annual Council meeting and Day on the Hill

This year's spring meeting of NARP's Council of Representatives—an all-volunteer advisory body elected by NARP members—promises to offer stimulating discussions, networking opportunities, and an opportunity to help influence Capitol Hill at a historic turning point for our cause.

Guest speakers on Monday, Apr. 22, will include Amtrak's Mark Yachmetz (Chief—Corporate Research & Strategy) and Joe McHugh (V.P.—Government Affairs). *Trains Magazine* passenger correspondent Bob Johnston also will speak during the conference.

The meeting takes place Monday and Wednesday, April 22 & 24, and NARP Day on Capitol Hill is Tuesday, April 23. Any member is welcome and encouraged to take part in Day on the Hill

free of charge—NARP staff will provide you with all necessary information and can even schedule meetings with Congressional offices upon request.

Early-bird registration for the meeting, available through April 5, is \$225 per person—with discounted rates of \$195 for first-time attendees and \$180 for attendees aged 18 to 30.

Register for Day on the Hill at www.narprail.org/hillday. Register for the Council meeting at www.narprail.org/register, or call (202) 408-8362.

The meeting venue is the Hilton Alexandria Old Town Hotel at 1767 King St. in Alexandria, VA—across street from the King Street Metrorail station and about a block from the Amtrak/VRE train station. ■

LaHood Touts Passenger Trains in Exit Interviews



The Republican / MassLive.com

LaHood arriving in Hartford, CT in 2010

US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Jan. 29 that he would leave when his successor is confirmed.

Secretary LaHood has been a steadfast champion of passenger trains. He keynoted NARP's 2011 and 2012 Capitol Hill receptions, and thanked NARP for our partnership in a 2012 blog post.

In media exit interviews, he has touted development of more and faster passenger trains, along with expanded rail transit and other car alternatives, as a key piece of President Obama's legacy. "It's the next generation of transportation for the next generation," LaHood is fond of saying.

On NPR's *Diane Rehm Show* Feb. 6, LaHood said, "I'm sure that when the Interstate [highway] system started

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Amtrak, California HSR Authority Move Towards Joint High-Speed Trainset Order

Amtrak and the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) may jointly place an order for high-speed trainsets that will be the first to operate in the U.S. at speeds up to 220 mph. The two agencies issued a Request for Information to potential manufacturers Jan. 17. The trainsets would start operating in California in 2022, and would operate sooner over the existing Northeast Corridor (NEC), supplementing existing *Acela* service. They could operate on Amtrak's planned "NextGen" Washington-Boston high-speed line.

The new equipment would be lighter than *Acela* and would have many designs and components common with the newest, overseas high-speed trains, and a higher standard of crash energy management than older European high-speed trains.

Amtrak plans to seek to regulatory changes to allow the new trains to operate in NEC service comingled with existing stock at speeds faster than 125 mph on tracks shared with other trains.

The combined order should mean lower unit costs even if the two types of equipment are not 100% identical.

NARP lauded the joint order in a Jan. 18 press release (www.bit.ly/hsorder). NARP President Ross Capon said, "Amtrak and CHSRA deserve praise for their efforts to advance high-speed rail in the U.S. We also are encouraged by FRA's work regarding advanced equipment, including approval of intermixing standard European rolling stock and regular, 'FRA-compliant' passenger equipment on the San Francisco-San Jose commuter line." ■

NEC "Critical Needs" Report

The Northeast Corridor Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission created by the big 2008 federal passenger train law released its first major report Jan. 31: *Critical Infrastructure Needs of the NE Corridor* www.nec-commission.com/resources/documents

The 18 Commissioners include five U.S. DOT officials, four from Amtrak,

NARP News

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505 Capitol Court, NE, Suite 300

Washington, DC 20002-7706

(202) 408-8362; fax: (202) 408-8287

narp@narprail.org

www.narprail.org

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Luis Olmo-Rivera	Coordinator of Resource Development
Lawrence E. Scott	Special Assistant to the Chairman

This has news through February 8
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and representatives—in most cases DOT secretaries—from states along the Corridor. ■

President's Corner

by Ross Capon

NARP added a nice touch to the Dec. 21 Christmas party of Capital Reach, a charity that mentors young people in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

The charity was co-founded by Russell Sullivan, long-time Senate Finance Committee Democratic staff director.

Model Trains; Charity; Valued Senate Staffer

He asked his assistant, NARP Member Jim Frisk, about a model train display for the party. Frisk reached out to NARP's Luis Olmo-Rivera.

Thus, Phillip Capon brought his Lionel trains. They were a hit! Announcements to the crowd at party's end included "special thanks to the National Association of Railroad Passengers for providing the model trains."

At left, from left to right, two children, Senate Finance Committee staffer Jim Frisk, and NARP's Luis Olmo-Rivera. The children enjoyed making it "snow" on the Lionel trains owned and operated by Phillip Capon, son of NARP Pres. Ross Capon. At bottom, from left, Frisk, Olmo-Rivera, and train owner Capon.

Sullivan was one of the most admired Hill staffers. He left the Senate last month to work in the private sector so he could support numerous young men who are his foster children or legal dependents, many of whom are in college now or will be soon.

Olmo-Rivera and I attended Sullivan's Jan. 29 farewell party. High praise for Sullivan's professional and philanthropic work came from Finance Chair Max Baucus (D-MT); Orrin Hatch (UT), top Republican on Finance; Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV); Commerce Chair Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), and John Kerry (D-MA), who had just been confirmed as secretary of state. Kerry joked, "Russ is leaving the Senate voluntarily. They just voted me out."

Mark Prater, chief tax counsel for Finance's Republican staff, called Sullivan businesslike, a builder (of relationships, policy, and a strong culture of ethics and professionalism), and benevolent. ■



Photos: Ross Capon



Amtrak Plans Many Upgrades for 2013

Amtrak begins 2013 with what it calls a “robust agenda of infrastructure upgrade projects, significant milestones for new equipment orders and key actions to advance its Northeast Corridor (NEC) high-speed rail program,” according to a Jan. 10 press release (www.bit.ly/atk2013).

Among the projects the release cites:

- Releasing an updated Fleet Strategy Plan.
- Reaching agreement with the Michigan Dept. of Transportation to operate, dispatch and maintain a section of state-owned railroad (recently purchased from NS) from Kalamazoo to Dearborn that will eventually support 110 mph top passenger train speeds.
- Conversion of all equipment that currently offers on-board WiFi Internet access to a 4G/LTE-based network, offering much faster download speeds. This will begin with the *Acela Express*. However, there are currently no plans to expand WiFi to equipment that does not currently have it, including all long-distance trains (except *Palmetto & Coast Starlight*) and some Midwest corridor trains.
- Delivery of the first cars from the or-

der of 130 new single-level sleepers, diners, baggage cars and baggage-dorm cars placed July 2010 (Aug. ‘10 *News*) with CAF USA by the end of the year.

- Delivery of the first of 70 new electric locomotives for the Northeast Corridor and Keystones ordered from Siemens in Oct. 2010 (Nov. ‘10 *News*).
- Completion of the replacement of the Niantic River bridge in Connecticut with a new movable span.
- Ongoing work to ultimately increase rail capacity and reliability on Amtrak-owned or maintained corridors, including New Haven-Springfield, Poughkeepsie-Schenectady (NY), and a section of the NEC in New Jersey.
- Advancing planning work for the Gateway Program to increase tunnel, track and station capacity between Newark, NJ and New York City.
- Implementing a new service allowing *Auto Train* passengers to pay an extra \$50 fee to guarantee that theirs is one of the first 20 vehicles offloaded from the train.
- Improving accessibility at stations under the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (see next page).
- Completing installation of Positive

Train Control on the NEC and Keystone Corridor, 2 years ahead of the legal deadline.

- Starting the equipment procurement process for next-generation high-speed trainsets for the NEC.
- Commencing engineering and environmental work towards replacing tunnels in Baltimore and replacing the Susquehanna River Bridge at Perryville, MD.

“Amtrak continues to advance and invest in projects that provide both near-term benefits and long-term improvements for the effective delivery and reliability of intercity passenger rail service,” President and CEO Joe Boardman said in the statement. ■

VIP Chief Inspection Train In KS, CO



Bob Johnston / *Trains Magazine*

Amtrak's McHugh (right front) and BNSF's Wessler talk to VIPs aboard BNSF's dome car *Scenic View*.

Amtrak and BNSF Railway hosted a Jan. 10 inspection of the line used by Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* from Topeka, KS to La Junta, CO. City managers, mayors and Kansas Dept. of Transportation officials, including Secretary Mike King, were briefed by BNSF Passenger Train Operations Dir. Rich Wessler and Amtrak Government Affairs VP Joe McHugh.

Ride conditions varied from 79 mph running on welded rail to 30 mph slow orders over 1955-vintage jointed rail. This section sees limited freight traffic.

Kansas participants made their return on the evening's eastbound *Chief*.

Chief service is at risk absent a funding agreement to rehabilitate and maintain track between Newton, KS and Albuquerque. Shared funding among Amtrak, BNSF, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico may be possible. ■

Discussions Continue on Restoring Amtrak Service to the Gulf Coast

Report by NARP Council Representative Paul Nelson

Tallahassee Mayor John Marks brought together passenger rail advocates including NARP members and business, government and academic leaders on Dec. 13 to reinforce the importance of passenger rail restoration to his city and region.

After listening to a presentation by John Robert Smith, President and CEO of Reconnecting America and formerly Amtrak Board Chairman and Mayor of Meridian, MS, Mayor Marks reinforced that “this meeting is on regional development and how passenger rail can help those economic opportunities.”

Passenger rail advocates expect a follow-up summit on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the spring because of ongoing strong leadership from the mayors of



Tallahassee Mayor
John Marks

all four Gulf Coast states as momentum builds to return passenger rail service from New Orleans east to Florida.

“NARP thanks the mayors for their leadership and looks forward to working closely with them to return Amtrak to the Gulf Coast,” said NARP Chairman Bob Stewart. ■

Amtrak Improving Accessibility at More Stations

Many hurdles remain towards full and independent wheelchair access to stations and trains; billions of \$ are needed

The US Dept. of Transportation adopted a new set of rules governing the accessibility of passenger trains (intercity and commuter) to people with disabilities that prevent them from climbing stairs. The rules, adopted in September, 2011, lay out what Amtrak and other carriers must do to comply with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. That law gives everyone the right to access public accommodations without assistance, regardless of physical condition.

The rules require all stations to permit level boarding (where the platform height is roughly equal to the passenger car's floor height) of all cars on all trains that are (A) open to passengers boarding at that station and (B) accessible to passengers who can't climb steps.

Where level boarding cannot be achieved, devices must be in place to let people who can't climb steps board the train without crew assistance. Examples: an automatically-operated lift built into the train car, a self-deploying platform extender, a bridge plate built into the platform.

Although most of the Amtrak system meets a bare minimum of functional accessibility to those using wheelchairs, more must be done to satisfy ADA. "We're a long way from the ideal of level boarding," says Amtrak's ADA Program Director Gary Talbot.

The floor of a bi-level Amtrak car (Superliners, Surfliners, California cars) is 17.5 inches above the top of the rail. Single-level Amtrak cars' (Amfleet, Viewliner, Horizon and Heritage) floors are 51 inches above top of rail. Talgo cars' floors are 30 inches above; they have step boxes for lower platforms.

But all six Class I railroads hosting Amtrak trains restrict the height of platforms adjacent to track used by freight trains to eight inches above the rail. This is ostensibly to prevent freight cars from scraping against the platform. Host railroads can do this because the US DOT has regulatory authority over passenger carriers that receive federal funds, but not privately-owned tracks and stations. DOT has concluded that

only Congress can change this. Under current practice, Amtrak submits a platform design for each station that the host railroad can accept or reject.

Where the platform is not as high as the train floor, either a bridge plate (a metal plate bridging the gap between train and platform, or providing a ramp from an 8-inch platform to a bilevel train) or a manually-operated wheelchair lift now is used to let people in wheelchairs board the train. Amtrak staff operate these, meaning someone who needs or wants a level platform cannot access the train *independently*.

Where stations serve both single-level and bilevel equipment, DOT standards require separate, full-length 15- and 48-inch platforms (which are considered "level" to each respective passenger car type). Next best: a 15-inch platform with 48-inch "mini-highs" (higher portions of the platform with ramps leading up to them; see photo). Amtrak must submit a plan to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for how it plans to satisfy the 2011 rule at each station, which FRA must approve. Many stations remain out of compliance, but there is no waiver-granting process. The Office of the Secretary of DOT makes the final call in all cases.

DOT also requires platforms to be accessible from the street or parking lot via level ground, either via elevators or via ramps that are no steeper than a certain slope. A station lacking these either has been granted approval based on other factors, has been "grandfathered in," or is not compliant.

Flag or conditional stops are exempt from ADA requirements, but Amtrak has only 19 and says no future station will be a "flag stop." ■

To be continued in a future issue...

See also March, April and August 2006, and April 2009 NARP News. Our July 28, 2006, submission to U.S. DOT is at www.bit.ly/narpada. More on DOT's current rules is at www.bit.ly/fra-ada



"Jersey Mike" / SubChat.com

Example of a 48-inch mini-high above an 8-inch platform at the Durham, NH Amtrak station. All Downeaster stations have these. On tracks used by freight trains, these are set back from the track and a crew-operated bridge plate is required for a person in a wheelchair to board or alight. A ramp is behind the mini-high (to left) in this view.

Amtrak and Sequestration

Sequestration is the requirement in the 2011 Budget Control Act (Public Law 112-25) for major across-the-board cuts. They were set for Jan. 2, 2013, but the recent debt ceiling deal postponed them to Mar. 1.

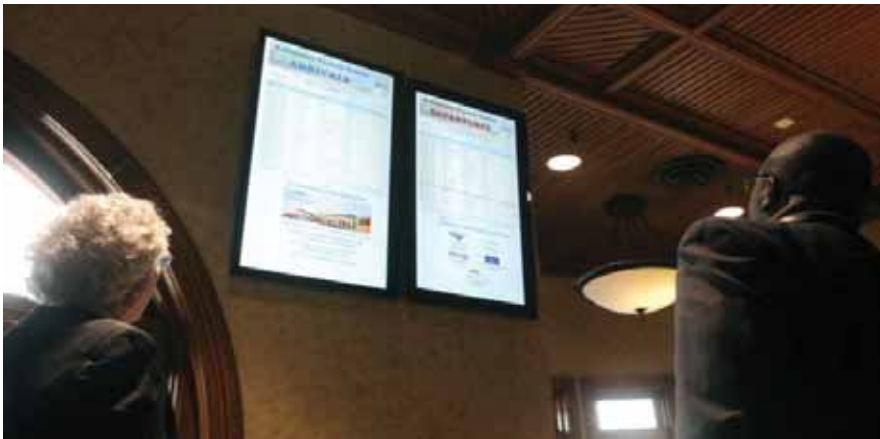
Amtrak says that sequestration in early January, according to Office of Management and Budget estimates, would have cut Amtrak's federal operating and capital/debt grants by 8.2% each—reductions of \$38 million and \$78 million, respectively.

Amtrak said it had been controlling costs and has had solid revenue growth so far this year. However, sequestration would seriously hurt the economy, which could hurt Amtrak's revenues.

Amtrak says it could withstand "a funding cut without cutting service," but NARP notes that would mean more backsliding on state of good repair work—for rolling stock and infrastructure—thus, in the future, inflating operating losses and reducing service quality.

President Obama in February proposed a further delay to sequestration to allow time to reorder budget cuts so they could be implemented with some intelligence. Current law requires blunt, *program-by-program* (not even department by department!) across-the-board cuts. ■

NARP's Arrival/Departure Boards Installed in Kalamazoo



Matt Gade, MLive.com/The Kalamazoo Gazette

Kalamazoo Mayor Bobby Hopewell (right) and his Director of Transportation, Bill Schomisch, view the newly installed electronic train and bus arrival and departure boards at the Kalamazoo Transportation Center. The boards were funded by a grant from the Sally Mead Hands Foundation to NARP to improve connections among local and intercity modes. They display scheduled times for Amtrak trains, Greyhound and Indian Trails intercity buses, and Kalamazoo Metro Transit buses. Below the schedule times are the local weather forecast and rotating advertisements—including the one shown for NARP here at right.

New Cost-Sharing Framework

ments in the media, has questioned whether it will keep service between Harrisburg, Altoona and Pittsburgh.

However, "Pittsburgh city Controller Michael Lamb has urged Gov. Tom Corbett to support improvements to Amtrak service from the city to Harrisburg, calling it 'an important transportation option' for Western Pennsylvania" (Pittsburgh *Post Gazette*, Feb. 6).

NARP Council Members are working hard to save the service; Michael Alexander was interviewed Feb. 6 on WESA, Pittsburgh's NPR station.

NARP has mounted a "Save the *Pennsylvanian*" campaign to urge

Sandy Recovery \$\$ for Amtrak, Transit

President Obama signed the Sandy Recovery Act on Jan. 29; it is Public Law 113-2.

It has \$118 million for Amtrak: \$86 million for capital and \$32 million that the US Dept. of Transportation can make available for operations (offsets for lost revenue).

The law has less than the \$336 million in the original Senate bill passed in December, but still lets Amtrak do work necessary to protect the New York City-area tunnels and other Northeast Corridor infrastructure against future cata-

strophic flooding. Amtrak estimates about \$60 million in Sandy damages—lost revenue and repair costs.

Other states where service may be at risk: Illinois, Indiana (our action page: www.bit.ly/hoostate), North Carolina, Vermont.

The Vermont and Virginia governors have put necessary funds in their budgets, but requests for tax increases makes outcomes less than certain.

We encourage all members with affected routes to contact their political leaders about the importance of keeping the trains running.

Infrastructure—more state pay-

ments later: The Section 209 mandate to cover capital also includes infrastructure. Implementation of this part is likely in a few years, after development of methodology for a similar requirement under Section 212 for the Empire Corridor ("West Side Connection" in Manhattan) and the Northeast Corridor.

The main purpose of 212 is to develop for the Northeast Corridor a level playing field methodology similar to what 209 is doing for states elsewhere. A likely outcome is that some commuter rail agencies will pay more to use the Corridor than they do today.

The Amtrak-owned Philadelphia-Harrisburg and New Haven-Springfield lines will fall under both 209 and 212, but 209 also will apply to Amtrak-owned track in Michigan.

The law also has about \$2 billion for highways.

This display is funded by a grant through the

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NARP members get a 10% discount on Amtrak rail fares.

Membership information at: www.narprail.org

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LaHood Exits

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there were governors who said we're not going to have a road running through our state. Now we have Interstates connecting the entire country. ... Over time, when the politicians catch up with the people, ...the majority of the country will be connected with passenger rail.

"The people are way ahead of the politicians [and] we're trying to stand with the people."

National Association of Railroad Passengers
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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

NARP Membership Meetings

April 6, Portland, ME, Clarion Hotel, across street from Amtrak station, Noon—2:30. NARP Council Member & TrainRiders/Northeast Pres. Wayne Davis: wedavis@trainridersne.org.

April 6, Harrisburg, PA: Regional membership meeting for members in PA, NJ and DE. 1:00 to 4:00 PM at a to-be-determined location within walking distance of the Harrisburg Amtrak station. Speakers include NARP Pres. Ross Capon. NARP Council Member Michael

Alexander: micalexa@uic.edu.

May 11, Chicago, IL, with Midwest High-Speed Rail Association Annual Membership Meeting. Time & location TBA; www.midwesthsr.org.

New speaker info: NARP Chair Stewart, Mar. 2, Tukwila, WA; NARP Pres. Capon, Mar. 16, Washington, DC. ■

Additional meetings were shown in last issue. We update information for all meetings at www.narprail.org/calendar

Sloppy Reporting x 2

NARP rebutted a Jan. 25 CNN hatchet job on the federal passenger train program, Vermont in particular. No train proponent was interviewed. See www.bit.ly/cnnrail; our response: www.bit.ly/narpcnn. Then, CNN's Feb. 3 report on Grand Central Terminal said most train stations are "desperate places" you wouldn't want to visit. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Paying on-board? You'll probably pay more. In order to be sure you will get the lowest fares, you must pay for your reservation in advance with a credit card at Amtrak.com, on the Amtrak mobile app, over the phone (1-800-USA-RAIL), at a QuikTrak machine, or with cash or credit card with a ticket agent at a staffed station.

Under a new Amtrak policy, if you buy your ticket from the train's conductor—whether by cash or credit card—you will now pay the highest fare (known as "Full Y"). You may have been quoted a lower fare over the phone, but that fare only applies if purchased at the time. This policy applies even if the station where you board has no ticket agent and no QuikTrak machine, although the on-board purchase surcharge, which has always existed, still only applies when a ticket is bought on board when boarding from a staffed location.

No more on-board sleeper upgrade discount: Under the same Amtrak policy change, conductors must sell coach-to-sleeper and Roomette-to-Bedroom upgrades for the same rate offered on-line and over the phone.

This change does not apply to the accommodation charges for Business Class or Acela First Class, whose fares do not change based on demand.

Amtrak Guest Rewards® point redemption policy changes: Effective Jan. 1, if you redeem points for a free trip and then "no show," you will not be able to have your points refunded to your account. Redemption reservations must be canceled prior to first scheduled departure for points to be re-deposited into your account or exchanged for a different itinerary.

Also, since Nov. 1, 2012, those redeeming points for free coach travel can only upgrade to a sleeper, Business Class or Acela First Class by re-

deeming additional points with Amtrak Guest Rewards over the phone (1-800-307-5000).

On Jan. 1, Amtrak Guest Rewards introduced a new most frequent traveler tier: Select Executive, achieved by earning 20,000 Tier Qualifying Points (generally through Amtrak travel) within a calendar year. Details at www.amtrakguestrewards.com.

Texas Eagle bus substitution Longview-Ft. Worth Feb. 15-21 and Feb. 28-Mar. 8: Union Pacific trackwork over single-track territory means a bus will ferry *Eagle* passengers, making stops at Mineola and Dallas at train times. On those days, the southbound *Eagle* will run one hour later Ft. Worth to San Antonio. No other change to train schedules. Bus is not shown in reservation system.

Correction: Parking at the new Norfolk Harbor Park Amtrak station costs \$5 a day.